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V CORPS ARTILLERY SOLDIERS, IRAQI POLICE STAGE 'SHOWDOWN' TO ROOT OUT ILLEGAL WEAPONS

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BA'QUBAH, Iraq -- As the war in Iraq continues, efforts are being made to reduce the number of available weapons used for insurgent attacks on both coalition forces and Iraqi civilians.



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Soldiers from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division confirm locations of buildings to be searched in Mufrek, Iraq during Operation Centaur Showdown.

Soldiers of Task Force 1st Battalion, 6th Field Artillery of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division and Iraqi police have been conducting searches and raids to root out illegal weapons here. Together they conducted Operation Centaur Showdown February 8 in the Ba'qubah suburb of Mufrek, looking for illegal or unregistered

weapons and to discourage any enemy activity in the area.

"Legally, it's OK to have one AK-47 (assault rifle) and one full magazine per household, as long as it's a registered weapon," said Sgt. 1st Class Jamie Loy, platoon sergeant for the Brigade Reconnaissance Team of the division's 3rd Brigade.

"But what we're looking for are unregistered weapons, bomb-making materials, explosives or anything the everyday civilian shouldn't have."

Loy explained Iraqi civilians who want to own AK-47s have to register the weapons with the local Iraqi police station. To do that, they bring their identification and weapon to the police station so the serial number can be recorded and matched to the identity of the owner.

With the support of M-2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, gun trucks equipped with Browning M-2 .50-caliber heavy machine guns, Mk-19 automatic grenade launchers and various other crew-served weapons, a combined group of more than 100 Soldiers and Iraqi policemen searched a 100-home neighborhood in Mufrek.

"One goal of the raid was to successfully intermix Iraqi policemen to go in as a "soft knock" instead of tearing the door down and entering the houses," said Sgt. Brian R. Peterson, BRT team leader. "It feels so much better having them go in (the houses) and deal with the people they should be dealing with, instead of us."

Peterson said working side by side with interpreters and Iraqi police makes the raids smoother and more comfortable.

"Having the policemen there puts Iraqi faces on the missions," said 1st Lt. Christian Boggiano, BRT platoon leader. They know the people and the area and can talk with the homeowners. Together it makes for less apprehension between the Soldiers and the civilians.

The search yielded a variety of weapons that were confiscated and brought to the local police stations, where they will be held until the owners go to the station to register them. If legal to own and properly registered, the weapons are returned to their owners.

If not properly registered, they are turned over to the Iraqi Army for use.

"Working together with the Iraqi forces gives me hope for this country, so they can take care of it on their own," said rifleman Pfc. William Baisley.

"It's their country. They should be running the show," agreed Peterson.

According to the task force situation report, the combined raid produced more than 65 unregistered weapons, including two sniper rifles and a complete set of ballistic body armor. More importantly, the mission was completed without any enemy contact or incidents.

